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THE GYPSY VU

A DRAMA

BY

ANTHONY E. WILLS

DICK & FITZGERALD

PUBLISHERS

18 Ann Street, New York

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DARKEY BREACH OF PROMISE CASE. Mock Trial.....	22
GREAT LIBEL CASE. Mock Trial; 1 Scene; 2 hours.....	21
RIDING THE GOAT. Burlesque Initiation; 1 Scene; 1½ hours	24

DICK & FITZGERALD, Publishers, 18 Ann Street, N. Y.

THE GYPSY

A Drama in Three Acts

(ADAPTED FROM THE FRENCH)

By ANTHONY E. WILLS

Author of "College Chums," "Count of No Account," "Eastsiders,"
"Just Plain Folks," "New England Folks," "Oak Farm,"
"Stubborn Motor Car," "Matinée Idol," "Benjamin,
Benny and Ben," "Too Many Husbands," etc., etc.

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THE GYPSY

CHARACTERS

COL. DEXTER, (*a Wealthy Southerner*) Old man
RUSSELL FORD, (*a Government surveyor*) Juvenile Lead
CAL. CHASE, (*president of the Chase Bank*) Heavy
JEAN ROSSI, (*the Gypsy*) Character Lead
GASTON, (*his companion*) Character
ZEB. HICKMAN, (*Sheriff of Danville County*) Character
ALEC. (*a colored servant*) Character
CHARLOTTE, (*Col. Dexter's wife*) Old Woman
MADALYN, (*Col. Dexter's supposed daughter*) Ingenue Lead

TIME.—Summer of the year 1880.

LOCALITY.—Milton, near Green Mountains, Virginia.

TIME OF PLAYING.—Two hours and a half.

SYNOPSIS.

ACT I.—Home of COLONEL DEXTER.

ACT II.—The Bungalow. *Five days later.*

ACT III.—A wood near Green Mountains. *The next morning.*

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS.

Costumes and description are given on the first entrance of each character.

PROPERTIES.

Wallet for the COLONEL. Pack of playing cards, wood for fire, revolver, stick to whittle for GASTON. Revolver, two letters, handcuffs for ZEB. Revolver, two coins, crop, visiting card, money for CAL. Legal document, gun, revolver for ROSSI. Ring, writing material, letter, picture, lamp, locket for MADALYN. Field glasses for FORD.

STAGE DIRECTIONS.

As seen by a performer on the stage facing the audience, R. means the right hand; L., the left hand; C., center of the stage; UP, toward the rear; DOWN, toward the footlights.

THE GYPSY

ACT I.

SCENE.—*A set house L., a rustic wall or fence running from R. to L., at back, with opening C. Rustic table with two chairs R. C. Rustic bench L. C. Landscape or wood drop at back. Green baize down. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon. ENTER MADALYN, a pretty girl of sixteen, wearing a bright colored dress. She enters from house and romping to gateway, looks about intently.*

MADALYN (*calling*). Alec? Oh, Alec! (*Glances about*) Where can he be, I wonder? What can be keeping him? (*Goes up to gate again and looks off R.*) Alec! Oh, Alec! (*Then suddenly*) Oh, here he comes now. (*Waving hand*) Hurry, Alec! Hurry!

ENTER ALEC., *an old colored servant, in livery, through gate from L. carrying a basket.*

MADALYN. My, Alec! but it took you a long time to go to the Old Mill. Mr. Ford has already arrived, and we've been waiting for you.

ALEC. (*wiping forehead with bandanna handkerchief*). Has he now? Ah'm sorry ah delayed. Only Missey (*looking around before continuing*) what do you s'pose? What do you think I seed jes' now?

MADALYN (*puzzled*). I don't know—I can't imagine.

ALEC. (*still mysterious*). Not spooks dis yar time—no, Missey—and no spirits nuther.

MADALYN. My, Alec! your manner puzzles me. Don't keep me in this dreadful suspense. What was it?

ALEC. (*looking around before speaking*). Bet you can't guess.

MADALYN (*clapping her hands with curiosity*). Oh, please, Alec, don't keep me waiting.

ALEC. Sho' as you are a standin' dar—I see a real, live gypsy.

MADALYN. A gypsy! How romantic!

ALEC. Yes, Missey, but it was more'n dat. In fact, two ob dem. Dey lives in a wagon, down yonder (*points L.*) at the turn of de road.

MADALYN. How I should have loved to have seen them, Alec.

ALEC. Dat's what I thought. Mebbe taint too late yet, Missey. Dey tells fortunes.

MADALYN. Fortunes?

ALEC. You bet. Fo' a quarter ob a dollar; and if one half of what dey told me comes true—Lordy, Missey—it wuz wurth hundreds o' dollars. Dat's sho' gospel, Missey.

MADALYN (*UP to gateway, looking L.*). Why, yes, I really do believe I can see the smoke from their camp-fire.

ALEC. (*who has joined her*). Dat's it, Missey—dat's it. Dat's de fire all right.

MADALYN (*warmly*). Wouldn't I like to have my fortune told! But dad would never hear of it, I know.

ALEC. Mebbe—somehow—it might be 'ranged, Missey.

MADALYN (*all interest*). How, Alec.—do tell me how?

ALEC. (*scratching head thoughtfully*). Well, I don't know fo' sho' but mebbe I might be able to—to——

CHARLOTTE (*calls from within*). Madalyn, dear! Oh, Madalyn!

MADALYN. Mama's calling me. (*Crossing to house*) Quick, Alec, what were you going to say?

ALEC. Well, I thought mebbe I might be able to fix it with de gypsies fo' you to meet 'em at the gate as they pass on dere way to the village.

MADALYN. I wish you would, Alec. Oh, don't I hope you can manage it.

[EXIT *into house*.]

ALEC. (*scratching head*). Yes—and mebbe I'll manage tu put dis ya' old head ob mine in a noose. De Colonel

would probably gib me de grand bounce. (*Going up to gate—looking off L., then toward house*) But p'shaw—dere can't be no harm in fortune telling—so long's it's de truth and dat gypsy sho' did tell me de truff. Didn't he say I was one ob the brightest men in 'Ginia? Yes, indeedy—and dat's gone some I reckon. (*Pauses an instant*) Ah'll jes take a chance and hab dem gypsies come here by de gate—den Missey Madalyn kin all decide fo' herself—and it won't be my funeral no how.

[*Shambles off through gateway L.*]

ENTER from house, COLONEL DEXTER, a dignified Southern gentleman, about sixty years of age, wearing a smoking jacket, followed by RUSSELL FORD, a government surveyor, wearing a blue suit, soft hat, leggings, and field glasses over one shoulder.

COLONEL. Well, my boy, it seems good to see you once again. Of all persons, I never suspected the government would send us such a surprise.

RUSSELL (*laughingly*). I believe, in a measure, I helped bring the thing about.

COLONEL. Indeed?

RUSSELL. For when I learned the officials had decided to survey this section, I asked for the assignment.

COLONEL. Sly dog—to renew your old acquaintanceships, eh?

RUSSELL (*warmly*). To be near my old friends.

COLONEL (*offering hand*). My boy, I'm proud of your success.

RUSSELL (*shaking his hand*). Thank you, Colonel.

COLONEL (*his hand on RUSSELL's shoulder*). Your father would be the happiest man in the world could he be here to witness it.

RUSSELL. It's awfully good of you to say so, Colonel. (*Then changing subject*) And you really believe you've struck a rich coal vein on your plantation?

COLONEL (*cautiously, looking about before speaking*). Not quite so loud, my son. I've not a doubt of it. We happened upon the lucky strike quite by accident only a

few days ago. From the look of things I've struck it very, very rich.

RUSSELL. I'm awfully glad to hear it.

COLONEL. My boy, I know that. Only the information is not for publication as yet. Not a soul outside of myself knows what you do. (*With chuckle*) There might be a—well, you know the trite saying about the cup and the slip.

RUSSELL (*joining in the laugh*). You bet I do—for I've experienced it, Colonel.

ENTER MADALYN *from house*.

MADALYN. Oh, you're out here. (*Coquettishly*) Business again?

COLONEL. Yes, my dear—business again. (*Crossing to house*) But I promise you we'll no more of it before dinner. (*To MADALYN*) Entertain Russell until I dress. (*To RUSSELL, with a bow*) Excuse me for a few moments.

RUSSELL. Why, certainly.

[EXIT COLONEL *into house*.

MADALYN (*anxiously going to him*). Well, did you speak to father about the——

RUSSELL (*his hands on her shoulders*). No, dear, your dad persisted in talking business——

MADALYN (*perturbed*). Always horrid business! (*Stamps foot*.)

RUSSELL. But I'll get an opportunity after dinner, I'm sure—when we've adjourned for our cigars.

MADALYN. Please don't delay or something may happen to interfere with our happiness.

RUSSELL (*lightly*). Nonsense, dear, what could happen?

MADALYN. Oh, I don't know. I've had such fears—such awful fears of late. Simply a presentiment of some kind, I suppose.

RUSSELL. There, there. I don't believe it possible your father would refuse his consent to our marriage.

MADALYN. I hope not, anyway. (*Looking around*) The shadows are deepening. It's growing chilly. (*Crossing to house*) Don't you think we'd better be going in?

RUSSELL. Just as you say.

[EXIT MADALYN into house.

RUSSELL (*crossing to house*). What did she mean, I wonder? (*Slowly repeating*) "Simply a presentiment of some kind, I suppose." Those were her very words. (*Starting*) Good heaven, can anything have happened to mar our happiness? (*Then recovering composure*) No, I'll put no stock in it! I won't believe it!

EXIT into house.

ENTER ALEC. *from L., coming through gate, followed by JEAN ROSSI, a middle-aged man, with gray straggling locks framing a fine, kindly face, and garbed as a gypsy. Close at his heels comes GASTON, his companion, a small, sad-faced, slightly deformed gypsy.*

ALEC. (*finger to lips*). S-h. Right dis way—right dis way. I may hab a job fo' you. Ain't sartin fo' sho' but jes yo' all wait heah and ah'll see. (*Looking around before speaking*) But don't you all go fo' to say ah invited yo' heah. It am distinctly understood I ain't had nuthin' tu do wid this—yo heah me? I don't want to git into no trouble—yo' all understan' dat?

ROSSI (*shakes head slowly in the affirmative*). Perfectly, perfectly.

ALEC. Well, I hope so, anyway. I'm takin' chances fo' sho'. [EXIT into house.

(GASTON *glancing nervously about, discovers a silver paper-cutter on the table, cautiously moves towards it, quickly picks it up and attempts to secrete it on his person.*)

ROSSI (*who has watched his every movement, seizes GASTON by wrist*). Drop it, Gaston! Drop it!

GASTON. Noble master, I was only——

ROSSI (*shaking him. Firmly*). Drop it, I say!

GASTON (*looks at ROSSI an instant, then realizing he is in earnest, drops paper-cutter to floor.*)

ROSSI (*releases him, shoving him L.*). I thought I'd broken you of that habit. (*Picks up paper-cutter.*)

The Gypsy

GASTON (*now on knees L. Brokenly*). Noble master, I implore your forgiveness.

ROSSI. Oh, Gaston—Gaston—I thought you always kept your promises. I'm surprised—ashamed at you! (*Suddenly starts. Glances R.*) What was that?

GASTON (*nervously crawls to bench and crouches behind same*). I heard nothing, master.

ROSSI (*replaces paper-cutter to table*). There it is again. Listen! (*Both pause attentively for an instant. To GASTON*) Some one may have witnessed your thieving act.

GASTON. No, no, master—don't say that. (*Nervously*) In heaven's name don't say that.

ROSSI. In which event we are lost—lost, do you hear? (*Starts again*) Listen! (*Then after a pause*) Lay low, some one approaches. (*Crouches behind table R. GASTON behind bench L.*)

ENTER through gate from R. CAL. CHASE, a good-looking man about twenty-five years of age, in riding costume, carrying crop.

CAL. (*crosses to door of house*). What the devil could have brought Ford back here, I wonder? (*Bitterly*) And I thought the race over—I believed it won. They must have been corresponding together all these years! What a fool I was not to have guessed it. Love is blind they say—and I've been very much in love. They've completely out-generalled me. I've been tricked—beaten at my own game. I've been a fool! (*Long whistle off R. starts*) Hello—the signal! (*UP to gate at back*) What can Zeb. want of me now? (*Long whistle again. Answers whistle and waves hand*) Must be something of importance to bring him out here. (*Comes down.*)

ENTER through gate from R. ZEB. HICKMAN, a good-sized, red-faced, uncouth, dark-haired, smooth-shaven Southerner, wearing black frock coat, trousers tucked in boots and black felt hat; carries a revolver in holster about his waist.

ZEB. (*looking around cautiously*). Hello, Cal. Is it O. K.?

CAL. (*anxiously*). Yes—speak quickly! Out with it!

ZEB. You hadn't left the postoffice a minute when I heard the postmaster say a letter had just come for Calvin Chase—so I brought it to you. (*Holds out letter*) Here it is.

CAL. (*anxiously taking it*). Ah, yes—thanks—I've been waiting to hear from New York for a month.

ZEB. I told old Dunham, the postmaster, I'd chase after you, but I never reckoned on a three-mile race. (*Wipes forehead with handkerchief, then dusts boots with same*) You sure did make that nag o' your'n cover the ground.

CAL. (*eagerly opening envelope*). What can the verdict be? (*Reads letter and starts*) My God!

ZEB. (*catching him in arms*). What is it, Cal? What is it?

CAL. Oh, I'm in for it, I guess—a ruined man—stone broke—unless— (*Glances toward house*) Yes, it's my one—my only chance now. (*Has fully recovered.*)

ZEB. What's happened?

CAL. Oh, I've gone the pace— (*Glances around before continuing*)—you know that fully as well as I do. That campaign of your'n alone cost me twenty thousand. Then that Morley woman in New York has robbed me of a small fortune, and now—and now (*Brokenly*) this comes (*Referring to letter*) my mining stocks are completely wiped out.

ZEB. (*slowly*). Then the bank?

CAL. Will go to the wall unless——

ZEB. Unless what?

CAL. (*looking around before speaking*). Unless old Dexter comes to my rescue.

ZEB. He can't help aidin' you since you're to be his son-in-law.

CAL. (*bitterly*). And that's no sure thing now.

ZEB. (*surprised*). Why, you don't mean to say——

CAL. I've a competitor, I'm afraid. You remember Russ Ford?

ZEB. Yes—his dad owned the next plantation. The boy pulled up stakes and piked it North to study.

The Gypsy

CAL. (*looking toward house*). And now, damn him, he's come back.

ZEB. Come back, eh? (*Whistles significantly*) I see.

CAL. If my supposition is correct, Madalyn and he have corresponded together all these years, and I'm plumb froze out.

ZEB. Pshaw, reckon it ain't as bad as all that. Can't I help in some fashion? (*Taps revolver*) I've got a way, you know.

CAL. (*quickly*). No, no—not *that* way—not *that* way. I'll try my own way first. Murder should always be the court of last resort. And now you'd better go. (*Glancing around*) S-h. Here comes Alec. I'll see you to your horse and then come back.

[EXIT BOTH *through gate, going R.*]

ENTER ALEC. *from house.*

ALEC. (*looking around*). Hello! I sho' left dem gypsies out y'ere and now dey's out o' sight—completely disappeared. (*Now c.*) I wonder where dey could a got to?

ROSSI and GASTON (*simultaneously present themselves to view*). Here—kind sir!

ALEC. (*starts*). Lordy me, yo' all near skeered me tu death. (*Trembling*) Don't yo' try no moh ob dem spook tantrums on me—no indeedy. Ma heart won't stand it no how.

ROSSI (*anxiously*). And the lady?

ALEC. She's to dinner and can't see yo' 'bout her fortune. Leastwise, I couldn't git word to her on 'count ob her dad. (*Waving hands*) So travel along. After thinking it ovah, mebbe it's better she don't see yo' all. (*Waving hands and shooing them off*) So travel along.

ROSSI (*to GASTON*). Alas, Gaston, disappointment is once more our lot.

GASTON (*sadly*). It always greets us with its laughing face.

ALEC. (*at door of house*). What's dat? Don't yo' call me no "laughing face." (*Waving hands*) Travel along

yo' all heah me?—travel along. [EXIT *into house.*

GASTON (*looking after him. Bitterly—imitating ALEC.*)
Travel along—travel along.

ROSSI (*placing arms about his shoulders*). There, there, Gaston. Things will brighten for us in the near future. Hard luck can not always be our portion. (*Looking toward R.*) But our two gentlemen friends—

GASTON. Ah, they mean this household no good, I vow. (*Bitterly*) It requires a fine coat to cover a multitude of sins.

ROSSI (*quickly*). Hush, some one approaches. We had best be making 'way.

GASTON (*bitterly*). Travel along—yes, travel along. (*They start for gateway.*)

ENTER CAL. CHASE *through gateway from R.*

CAL. (*observing them*). Hello, whom have we here? Gypsies, as I live. (*Looks them over.*)

ROSSI (*with sweeping bow*). Gypsies, good sir.

GASTON (*with bow, referring to ROSSI*). Know my master, the renowned Jean Rossi, who pries into the future, unfolds the present and makes known the past.

CAL. (*with laugh*). A wonderful personage, indeed! Tells fortunes, eh? What a lark. By Jove, you shall acquaint me with my destiny. (*Produces coin.*)

ROSSI (*hardly believing him*). Really, good sir?

CAL. If you are as good as your friend's word (*Referring to coin*) this gold piece shall be yours. And I'll wager twice the amount, you cannot tell me my name. (*GASTON significantly nudges ROSSI, and unseen by CAL. heartily laughs.*)

ROSSI. The telling of names is my specialty—one of the easiest things I do. (*GASTON hands ROSSI pack of playing cards. ROSSI holding pack out to Cal.*) Select your card.

CAL. (*highly amused—does so*). Now, then—remember my offer—twice the amount if you can tell me my name. But remember it is neither White, Brown, nor Black.

ROSSI (*looking at card—then seriously*). Your name is Chase—Calvin Chase, kind friend.

CAL. (*starts*). The devil you say.

ROSSI (*calmly*). No, I said Chase—Calvin Chase.

CAL. (*down to table*). This grows interesting. Be seated. (ROSSI sits R. of table. GASTON stands back of same).

CAL. (*sitting L.*). Go on. You have guessed my name. What else?

ROSSI. Ah, but first the little matter——

CAL. What little matter?

ROSSI (*rubbing hands together. Smilingly*). Of “twice the amount.”

CAL. (*confusedly taking coin from pocket*). Oh, yes—quite so. I’d almost forgotten.

ROSSI. Thank you. (*Holding out pack*) And now select another card. (CAL. *gingerly does so.*)

ROSSI (*looking at card*). You are president of a large institution—in fact, a bank—a bank which bears your name. You have lost much money of late——

CAL. (*nervously*). Yes, yes——

ROSSI. And are at present, financially involved. (CAL. *nervously glances about.*)

ROSSI. In fact, standing on the brink of ruin unless——

CAL. (*eagerly*). Unless what?

ROSSI. Unless you repair your shattered fortune by a marriage to——

CAL. (*bringing hand heavily down on table*). Enough of this—enough! (*Looking at Rossi*) Who are you that you should tell me this? (*Breathing hard*) My word—how did you know?

ROSSI (*coolly toying with cards*). The cards, good gentleman—I read it in the cards.

CAL. (*scattering cards from table*). You read too much in the cards. (*Tossing coin on table*) There is what I promised you. Now be off—off, do you hear? (*Going to house. Then halting*) But stay. I must see you again before you leave this vicinity.

GASTON. Our camp is in the valley yonder. (*Points off L.*)

CAL. Very well. I will probably call on you. Await me there. And now be gone—be gone!

ROSSI (*nudges GASTON and winks significantly. Then looks at coins*). A fair day's profit. Many thanks, kind sir. (*With sweeping bow*) Good day.

[EXIT *through gateway L., bowing as he goes.*

GASTON. Adieu! Adieu! [EXIT *through gateway L.*

CAL. How did the fellow know? How did he know? (*Going R.*) Witchcraft? Bah, not in these days. The knave guessed it, that's all. He guessed it. But I must know more of him before I feel at ease. His "guess work" was too near the truth for my comfort. (*Looking L.*) Hello, the Colonel. (*Quickly moves R.*)

ENTER COLONEL DEXTER *from house, wearing a frock coat, followed by CHARLOTTE, his wife, a gray-haired, mild-mannered woman, and MADALYN.*

CAL. (*with out-stretched hand*). Ah, Colonel.

COLONEL (*shaking his hand*). My dear Calvin.

CAL. (*over to CHARLOTTE, shaking her hand*). Mrs. Dexter (*Then to MADALYN*) and Madalyn.

CHARLOTTE. Why didn't you let us know you were coming? We've just dined (*Starts toward house*) but I'll tell Mandy to—

CAL. Don't bother, please. I dined in town. The evening was so cool, I felt a ride would prove refreshing. (*CHARLOTTE and MADALYN seat themselves on bench.*)

COLONEL (*to Cal.*). I'm glad you came. We've a surprise for you. Your old school fellow—Russell Ford, arrived to-day from the North.

CAL. (*bitterly*). Yes, I heard something of the sort in town.

COLONEL. Russ. has made wonderful strides in his profession. Has charge of the entire Virginia Geographical Department. (*Takes CAL. UP stage and engages him in conversation*) It's wonderful—wonderful!

CHARLOTTE (*looking back at them. Then to MADALYN*). Madalyn, I feel you should inform your father of the—

MADALYN (*alarmed*). No, no, mother, I couldn't.

CHARLOTTE. Then *I* will tell him.

MADALYN (*grasping her by arm*). No, no, mother. Dad will be so angry. He will——

CHARLOTTE. Your father has a right to know, my dear. It is impossible to keep the truth from him longer. (*To COLONEL*) Henry.

COLONEL (*coming down*). Well, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE. I feel it is only right that you should know that Madalyn is in love.

COLONEL (*starts*). In love?

CHARLOTTE (*to MADALYN*). Don't be alarmed, child. (*To COLONEL*) Forgive my also being a party to the deception, but Madalyn is in love with Russell Ford.

CAL. (*starts. Aside*). Russell Ford—I thought so.

CHARLOTTE. And he has asked for her hand in marriage.

COLONEL (*leans against chair L. of table*). My God!

ENTER RUSSELL FORD *from house*.

CHARLOTTE (*UP to COLONEL*). Why, Henry, you're faint! What ails you, dear? Surely—surely you're not displeased with Madalyn's choice?

COLONEL (*brokenly*). No, no, it isn't that, only I——

RUSSELL (*crossing to him*). Colonel, you're not angry with me?

COLONEL (*dejectedly*). No, no—it's—well, I don't know what to say.

CHARLOTTE (*to RUSSELL*). The Colonel often has these attacks after dinner. He heartily consents to the marriage. The engagement can be announced to-morrow.

CAL. (*aside. Bitterly*). Announced to-morrow! So I've lost out, eh? It's time I called on Zeb. to aid me. (*Silently UP to gate at back, intently watching proceedings.*)

COLONEL (*now seated on chair*). At last, at last I am face to face with the crisis.

CHARLOTTE (*over to him*). Crisis? What crisis? Really Henry, I've never seen you act like this before. Aren't you going to give them your blessing?

COLONEL (*with difficulty*). I wish I could, my dear, but there is an obstacle.

ALL. An obstacle? (CAL. *slowly withdraws L., looking back*).

CHARLOTTE (*nervously*). You astound me, Henry. An obstacle? Surely we have the right to——

COLONEL (*up, his hands on CHARLOTTE'S shoulders*). The time has come when you must know all—when I must speak. But first I must have a word with Russell—Mr. Ford—and alone.

CHARLOTTE (*alarmed*). Henry, Henry, what is it? What is it?

COLONEL (*firmly*). I must first see the lad—alone.

RUSSELL (*crosses to MADALYN and takes her hand*). Nothing on earth shall part us, my dear. Nothing.

CHARLOTTE (*hesitates an instant*). Oh, Henry, Henry, I don't know what to think. (Then crosses to MADALYN) Come, my dear. (Places arm about her, leads her to house, then looks back at COLONEL and shakes her head sadly, as if not understanding.)

[EXIT CHARLOTTE and MADALYN *slowly into house*.

COLONEL (*to RUSSELL, when they are alone*). Sit down a moment. (Motions to bench. RUSSELL sits. CAL. *slinks on at back at this moment and, unobserved by others, listens to following*).

COLONEL (*after a pause*). My boy, I have no desire to oppose this union, but when I have done you will realize why the marriage can never take place.

RUSSELL. Oh, please don't keep me in this terrible suspense. What is it—what is this terrible secret?

COLONEL (*quietly*). Madalyn is not my daughter.

RUSSELL (*slowly rising*). Not your daughter!

COLONEL. Her real name is Helen Gray.

RUSSELL (*repeating in a half daze*). Helen Gray.

COLONEL. The daughter of a poor woman whom my plantation foreman befriended many years ago.

RUSSELL. But your wife believes that——

COLONEL. Madalyn is our child. I had to do it. I had to deceive her.

RUSSELL (*bowing head in hands*). My God!

COLONEL (*UP, his hand on RUSSELL's shoulder*). I know it's hard, my boy—but you had to know the truth. I couldn't keep it from you. (*Then, after a sigh*) It was during the Civil War. I was badly wounded during the Battle of Blue Mountain, as you may have heard. The same day, my wife gave birth to a daughter, but the baby lived only an hour. Bereft of reason, my wife never knew this. The doctor, fearing, that should my wife realize her loss, it would prove fatal, prevailed upon me to substitute the child of the poor woman, to whom I have already referred. This substitution was known to none at the time save the doctor, the poor mother, and myself. My wife, even now, does not know of the deception played upon her. To this day, I have never divulged the secret to any one.

RUSSELL. And Madalyn's father?

COLONEL. Was a knave—a scoundrel—but I knew almost nothing of him. The woman had been separated from her husband for several months, she said. He may now be dead—but, if living, is likely to appear at any time and claim his child.

RUSSELL. Horrible—horrible.

COLONEL. That has always been my greatest fear. The thought has made me an old man much before my time.

RUSSELL. Poor Madalyn! Poor, poor Madalyn!

COLONEL. Yes, poor Madalyn! How I am to make known the dreadful truth to her is beyond me. It will kill my poor wife, I know.

RUSSELL (*looking up*). No one knows the story, you say, save——

COLONEL. You and I. The doctor who attended my wife has long since passed away.

RUSSELL (*UP*). Then give us your blessing. I love Madalyn for herself alone. Let us both forget the secret. Let Madalyn live in ignorance of the truth and preserve her happiness and your dear wife's health.

COLONEL (*offering hand. Warmly*). My boy, I'm proud of you. It shall be as you wish. (*Taking him by arm and leading him L.*) You have lifted a great load

from my mind. Come, let us relieve their minds as well.
[EXIT both into house.]

CAL. (*coming down c.*). So, that's it, eh? Was ever man in better luck? How fortunate I heard all. I must prevent this marriage. (*Pauses*) But how? How? (*After another pause*) Ah, I have it. I must produce a father! (*Chuckles*) A father to claim his living child. (*Halts suddenly*) Easier said than done, however. I'll get Zeb. Hickman to aid me. (*Up to gate. Halts*) There may be work for the "Court of Last Resort." (*Suddenly*) Hello! By Jove, here's a chance! One of the gypsies is returning. Why not inveigle him into my scheme? The very idea. I'll do it!

ENTER ROSSI, with gun, through gateway from L.

CAL. (*hailing him*). Ah, my good man, hunting in the woods?

ROSSI (*looking about*). I was told there's good quail near the stream yonder.

CAL. I have something that will pay you better than hunting.

ROSSI. So? Then out with it. The business of fortune telling is none too profitable in these parts.

CAL. Perhaps that's because it's a dead art in this region.

ROSSI (*puzzled. Coming down*). A dead art?

CAL. Every one hereabouts can read fortunes.

ROSSI. You surprise me.

CAL. For instance, (*Looking around before speaking*) I can read your past life.

ROSSI. I hope not *everything*. It might prove my undoing.

CAL. You are a married man.

ROSSI. True enough—I was.

CAL. (*looking around*). You deserted your wife.

ROSSI (*sternly looking at him*). Why, how did you—

CAL. (*continuing*). And you have a daughter.

ROSSI. Ah, there I have you. The rest was true enough—but I never had a child.

CAL. Your name is——

ROSSI (*firmly*). Rossi—Jean Rossi. (*Angrily*) But enough of this. What are you driving at?

CAL. (*glancing about before again speaking*). How would you like to earn a thousand dollars?

ROSSI (*starting*). How would I what?

CAL. (*repeating slowly*). Like to earn a thousand dollars.

ROSSI. I suppose it's nothing short of murder. (*Starting R.*) I want none of your——

CAL. (*restraining him*). Wait a bit. Suppose it was easily earned. Suppose, for instance, you had but to return here in five minutes and claim a certain young lady as your daughter?

ROSSI (*laughing*). As *my* daughter?

CAL. Force her to leave with you and——

ROSSI. Do you take me for a fool? Why, that is kidnapping! (*Starts R.*)

CAL. (*restraining him once more*). But not around here. The sheriff is my hireling; he takes his orders from me. Five minutes work and a small fortune is yours.

ROSSI (*after a pause*). It's a tempting morsel. I'll think it over.

CAL. Good.

ROSSI. But, hold on. What do you gain by all this?

CAL. Well, I suppose I must tell you. (*Glances around*) It's this way. This girl will come into a large fortune at the death of her foster father. Of that I know; further than this, already a number of deeds of valuable coal lands, providing for her future welfare, have been placed on record. Once she is under my control, I have no fear as to the rest. Come, now, what do you say?

ROSSI. I say, you're a cunning rascal!

CAL. The chapel where they keep all particulars of the births and deaths in this vicinity is only at the turn of the road. We can be gathering our proofs before your presentation.

ROSSI. You say the sheriff's——

CAL. Entirely under my control. It's not at all a risky business.

ROSSI. Well, I've been a miserable failure all these years, and I suppose should be forgiven for stooping so low. I'm only a poor dog without friend or future, so what's the odds? I'll do your bidding. I'll be your bogus father.

CAL. (*slapping him heavily on shoulder*). Good! You'll not regret it. (*Starts for gate*) Wait! It wouldn't do for us to be seen together. (*Looking around*) I have it. You await me in the thicket. (*Pointing L.*) I'll hurry to the chapel and return as quickly as possible. When you hear my whistle, you will know all is well. Do you understand?

ROSSI. Everything.

CAL. Good! Then to your hiding place.

[EXIT ROSSI *through gate L.*

CAL. (*triumphant*). All is not lost even yet. If things pan out as I figure, I will win out after all.

[EXIT CAL. *through gate and off L.*

ENTER ALEC. *from house, goes to C. and looks off L.*

ALEC. Hello, if dere ain't Marse Chase going toward the gypsy camp. I wonder whether he's gwine to hab his fortune told? Well, if he is, I'll bet he hears of a bad finish. Dat man nevah did strike me as bein' on de level, and I wouldn't be 'tall 'sprised to see him wind up in de lock-up, no, siree—not a bit. (*Arranges chairs at table.*)

ENTER ZEB. HICKMAN, *cautiously, through gate from R., looking back.*

ZEB. (*at gate*). Gad, what a narrow escape.

ALEC. (*espying him*). Howdy do, sheriff.

ZEB. (*starting*). Oh, hello, Alec. I didn't know you were there.

ALEC. Yo' all kinder acted dat way. Yo 'pear mighty excited, Marse Sheriff—what's up?

ZEB. (*endeavoring to control himself*). It's nothing—

nothing. (*Then with effort*) I want to see the Colonel. Is he in?

ALEC. Yes, sah—but busy—very busy jes' now. A sort o' family confab ah reckon. De whole family am in de settin' room and——

ZEB. I must see him, and at once.

ALEC. Well, I dunno whether de Colonel—(*Then changing tone*) Impo'tant, yo' say, Marse Sheriff?

ZEB. (*glancing uneasily R.*). Yes, very important.

ALEC. Well, den ah'll tell him. Mebbe he'll see yo' arter all. [EXIT *into house.*

ZEB. (*nervously*). I wonder whether Cal. caught a glimpse of me darting behind those bushes? It wouldn't do for him to know I tried to double-cross him. I thought he'd gone to town. Gad, what luck. I espied him not a moment too soon.

ENTER COLONEL *from house.*

COLONEL (*espying ZEB.*). Alec. said you wanted to see me, sheriff.

ZEB. (*coming down*). Yes. Got a minute to spare?

COLONEL. Just about a minute. You interrupted me in a very important——

ZEB. (*breaking in upon his line*). Then I'll be brief. (*Looking around before speaking*) Colonel, I've got a proposition to make to you.

COLONEL (*puzzled*). That so?

ZEB. Yes. Thinkin' perhaps you might want to sell out your place here, I've come to make you an offer.

COLONEL (*on guard*). You make an offer? Why, sheriff, I didn't know you——

ZEB. Well, to be candid with you—it taint me alone. I represent a company.

COLONEL (*strokes mustache*). Ah, I see.

ZEB. A company as is buyin' up a lot o' land in this section. Willin' to pay a pretty fair figure, too.

COLONEL. Might I ask the name of this corporation?

ZEB. (*reluctantly*). Well, I ain't at liberty to say—jes now.

COLONEL. Why are they so anxious to purchase my place?

ZEB. No reason in particular that I know of—'cept they looked it over and liked it.

COLONEL (*starts*). Looked it over? When?

ZEB. (*biting lip*). Well—perhaps I shouldn't have said that.

COLONEL (*angered*). Ah—now I know. Two nights ago, Alec. thought he saw some trespassers in the North Field. I believed him mistaken. Now I know the truth. They were spies! Your corporation is the notorious Virginia Coal Company! Not content with prowling about my grounds at night, of all persons, they send *you* here to complete their scheming plot. Go back to your employers! Tell them I know all about the coal ore in the North Field. Tell them their plan has failed, and that no offer they might make would now be acceptable to me. (*At door of house.*)

ZEB. But, Colonel—one moment—let me explain! Let me——

COLONEL. Not another word! Go, sir! Go! before I summon my servants and have you forcibly ejected from my grounds. [EXIT *angrily into house.*

ZEB. (*completely taken by surprise*). Well, what do you think of that? The whole plan a complete fizzle. And after all our weeks of hard work. (*With a chuckle*) The old man must have known about the coal vein all along—and we thought him ignorant of the fact. (*Starting toward gate*) Well, I did the best I could. The boys can't blame me. (*Looking L.*) It wouldn't do to run into Cal. again. Guess I'll take the short cut into town.

[EXIT *off R., behind wall.*

ALEC. (*pokes head out of door of house*). Nobody 'bout? (*Stretches neck and looks around, then comes gingerly out*) Marse Colonel done told me to 'ject de sheriff, ef he still wus prowlin' 'bout de grounds. Well, it am easier to tell some one else to do it—den do it yo' self. Dat sheriff man am some strong, yes, indeedy—and would be doin' some 'jectin' hisself, ah reckon. (*Looking around*) I'm sure glad he went ob his own accord. (*Going toward*

house) But I won't tell de Col'nel dat. (*Chuckling*) No, indeedy. Ah'll tell him he raised an awful rumpus and so ah was compelled to run him clean off de place. (*Chuckling*) Yo' kain't fool dis yere old nigger—no, siree—not dis old nigger. (*Low whistle heard off L. Starts*) Hello, wonder what dat kin mean? (*Whistle repeated. Looking off*) Dere it goes again! (*Peering off L.*) Ef it ain't Marse Chase hurrying dis way—(*Suddenly*)—now he's stopped—and, hello!—ef it ain't one ob dem gypsy's talkin' to him.

ENTER MADALYN, *followed by* CHARLOTTE, *from house.*

MADALYN. Ah, mother, I'm so happy now.

CHARLOTTE. And so am I, dear. To think the marriage will take place after all. (*To ALEC.*) Oh, Alec., please sec that Able feeds the horses.

ALEC. (*still looking L.*) Yes, ma'm—yes, ma'm.

[EXIT *off R., continuing to glance off L.*

MADALYN (*holding up hand*). And look, mama, at this beautiful ring.

CHARLOTTE. The engagement ring. Kiss me, dear. (*Kisses MADALYN*) I hope you will always be supremely happy.

MADALYN. Oh, I know I shall. (*CHARLOTTE wipes eyes with handkerchief.*)

MADALYN. You're crying, mother, dear. What is it?

CHARLOTTE. I dread to think of our coming separation.

ENTER RUSSELL FORD, *from house, stands in doorway.*

MADALYN. I know how hard it will be but then we will only remain North in the summer, and each winter return here with you.

CHARLOTTE (*to RUSSELL*). And when is the marriage to take place?

RUSSELL (*coming down*). Before my return to New York next week.

CHARLOTTE (*arm about MADALYN*). I wish it were possible for both of you to remain always with us.

MADALYN. So do I, mother, dear, but we must consider Russell's prospects—his future.

CHARLOTTE. You are right, Madalyn. (*To RUSSELL*) And I hope one day to see you at the head of your profession.

RUSSELL. That's very kind of you.

ENTER JEAN ROSSI, *slowly from L., halting at gate.*

ROSSI. Pardon, kind gentle-folk, but I am looking for the family of one Dexter—Colonel Dexter.

MADALYN (*UP*). The gypsy! Alec. must have—
(*Then endeavors to hide her face.*)

CHARLOTTE. This is the Colonel's plantation. I am his wife. What can we do for you?

ROSSI (*coming down C.*). If it is not too much trouble I would a word with him.

CHARLOTTE (*to RUSSELL*). Would you mind asking the Colonel to step here?

RUSSELL. Not at all. [EXIT *into house.*

CHARLOTTE (*to ROSSI*). Won't you be seated?

ROSSI (*sits in chair L. of table*). Thank you.

ENTER COLONEL DEXTER *from house.*

COLONEL (*looking around*). Russell said—

CHARLOTTE (*referring to ROSSI*). A gentleman to see you, Henry.

COLONEL (*looking at ROSSI in surprise*). To see me?

ROSSI (*rising*). Yes, good sir—to see you—and alone.

CHARLOTTE (*to MADALYN*). Come, dear, we'll leave your father to his business.

[EXIT *with MADALYN into house.*

COLONEL (*looking ROSSI over*). Your manner, to say the least, is quite unusual. Now, then, what is it?

ROSSI. You are Colonel Dexter, I take it?

COLONEL. Dexter is my name, sir.

ROSSI. And I, sir, am but a humble wanderer on the

face of this globe on which we live; a man, a poor—a lonely man, who once had happiness within his grasp, but foolishly let it slip away from him.

COLONEL. I am sorry for you but I don't really see how all this interests me. (*Taking wallet from pocket*) If you are looking for alms——

ROSSI (*distinctly*). I am *looking*—for my daughter.

COLONEL (*starts*). Your daughter?

ROSSI (*quietly*). My long lost daughter.

COLONEL (*with difficulty*). Why—oh why, do you come here?

ROSSI. Because it is *here* I expect to find my little girl—my Helen.

COLONEL. Man! You must be mad!

ROSSI (*rising*). It is you who must be mad. Mad, to imagine you could longer carry out the deception. Oh, the records are all straight—and do not lie. The young lady in your household, passing as your daughter Madalyn, is, in truth, none other than the child for whom I have been seeking this many a day and year. (*A sigh escapes the COLONEL's lips*) They told me in the village where I might find the chapel of Milton.

COLONEL (*starts and repeats*). The Chapel of Milton!

ROSSI (*continuing*). It was there, there! I found the proofs of my daughter's birth and my poor wife's decease. (*Producing paper*) I have brought the transcript with me.

COLONEL (*glancing around*). Good heavens, man, not so loud. The truth, I fear, would break my poor wife's heart.

ROSSI. Ah, then I *speak* the truth.

COLONEL (*sinking on bench*). I hardly know—alas, I can hardly think.

ROSSI. I admit that the circumstances of my separation from my wife were not ones to commend me. I was a younger man then—much younger, and only awoke to a realization of my indiscretion when it was too late—when it was no longer possible to mend my wrong-doing. (*Referring to paper. In mock sorrow*) See, here are the transcripts—the proof of my unhappy wife's demise—the record of my poor child's birth.

COLONEL (*nervously*). Please, please, not so loud. I am truly at your mercy. What do you ask? (*Then after an instant's pause*) If any sum——

ROSSI (*rising, indignant*). Sum? Sum?

COLONEL. If ten thousand dollars will purchase your silence.

ROSSI. Alas, that sum would buy most anything. (*Then changing tone*) But you forget a father's feelings. It can't buy love, no, no, it can't buy that.

COLONEL. Then name your own figure. I will pay most any price.

ROSSI. Money will not aid you. (*Shaking head*) The little one must be known to the world as my child.

COLONEL. Think, man—think. Is there no way by which we might——

ROSSI (*shaking head*). I am sorry, but there is no other way.

COLONEL (*sighs*). Very well, the time has come for me to confess my awful secret. (*At door of house*) It will prove a blow to the little one—it will break my poor wife's heart.
[EXIT *into house*.]

ENTER CAL. CHASE, *eagerly, from L.*

CAL. (*to Rossi*). Well—how did it go?

ROSSI. Succeeded, of course. Oh, this is hard business. I am almost sorry for the part I played. It was heart-rending. The poor old chap has gone in to make known the astounding lie I told him.

CAL. You're a sentimental fool. Don't delay. Make a firm stand and take the girl away.

ROSSI. Away? Where?

CAL. Why, we went over all that. To my bungalow, of course, on the main road. (*Takes card and writes*) Here (*Hands it to Rossi*) is a card to my lodge-keeper. A carriage is waiting at the cross-road. (*Pointing R.*) So don't tarry. Do you understand?

ROSSI. Perfectly. (*With sarcasm*) You must be a graduate of the school of villainy. A fine business, indeed.

CAL. (*irritated*). You need not fear. I have instructed the sheriff as to his duty. He is with us. (*Glancing toward house*) S-h; the Colonel. Be on your guard. (*Gets in shadow of house.*)

ENTER COLONEL DEXTER *from house.*

COLONEL (*brokenly, to ROSSI*). Come, sir, come. I have broken the news to them. The first shock is over. Your daughter awaits you.

ROSSI. Very well, I follow you. (*Starts toward house.*)
[EXIT COLONEL *into house.*

CAL. (*touching ROSSI on arm*). Courage, man, courage. You must not fail at the eleventh hour.

ROSSI. Have no fear. I've already gone too far to turn back now. [EXIT *into house.*

CAL. (*looking after him, chuckles*). So much for that. (*Moving R. c.*) The whole affair was managed more easily than I thought. What simpletons they are! What fools!

ENTER RUSSELL FORD *from behind house.*

RUSSELL (*apparently looking for something*). I'm sure I left it out here—(*Comes face to face with CAL.*) Cal. Chase!

CAL. Russ. Ford!

RUSSELL (*offering hand*). Well, well, it seems good to see an old friend again. How are you, Cal? (CAL. *angrily pushing his hand away and crossing R.*) Why, you don't seem glad to see me. What's happened—what's up?

CAL. Surprised you asked. You know well enough. You didn't play fair.

RUSSELL. You're talking riddles, Cal. Make yourself plain.

CAL. (*close to him*). I mean Madalyn—that's who I mean. You tried to cut me out.

RUSSELL. Cut you out?

CAL. Yes—but I've beaten you at your own game.

ENTER COLONEL DEXTER, *who stands in doorway of house.*

RUSSELL. You know as well as I do, that we were practically engaged before I left Virginia. I couldn't very well cut you out—when you never had a chance.

CAL. Oh, is that so? Well, perhaps I've a better chance than you think. Perhaps you'll be surprised when you learn your marriage can't take place.

RUSSELL (*staggered*). Can't take place? (*Turning on CAL. with uplifted hand*) Why you——

COLONEL (*stepping between them. To RUSSELL*). Hold on, my boy—he's right.

RUSSELL (*slowly lowering hand*). Right, you say?

COLONEL (*brokenly*). What I have feared for years has come to pass. Madalyn's father has come to claim her.

RUSSELL (*sinking on chair L. of table*). Madalyn's father!

ENTER MADALYN, *from house, her eyes buried in her handkerchief, supported by ROSSI, who, with arm about her waist, starts to lead her toward gate.*

ROSSI. There, there, my child, it is all for the best.

COLONEL (*wringing hands*). This will be the death of my poor wife.

RUSSELL (*looking at ROSSI*). Then you—you are——

ROSSI (*quietly*). This dear child's father. (*RUSSELL sinks on chair, buries head on table.*)

COLONEL (*to RUSSELL*). He speaks the truth. I have thoroughly examined his proofs. (*Then to ROSSI*) But you will let her remain with us for a few days. By then, I hope, my wife's unhappy condition will have changed for the better and——

CAL. (*nudging ROSSI. Whispers*). No, no!

ROSSI (*firmly to COLONEL*). I am sorry, but my feelings must also be considered. My daughter goes with me now. (*Leading MADALYN to gateway.*)

COLONEL (*now L. with outstretched arms*). Madalyn! Madalyn!

MADALYN (*with a sob*). Father! Father! (*Runs to him and buries her head on his shoulder.*)

COLONEL. You will write to us, dear. You will let us know how——

ROSSI (*taking MADALYN by arm and forcing her from COLONEL*). Come, my child, come! (*Leads her back to gateway.*)

COLONEL (*brokenly*). Good-bye; good-bye.

ROSSI (*starts to lead MADALYN off R.*).

RUSSELL (*rising suddenly*). I can't let her go that way! (*UP to gateway. With arms outstretched*) Madalyn! Madalyn! They shan't take you from me! (*MADALYN looks back at him.*)

CAL. (*at gateway—has intercepted RUSSELL, triumphantly barring his way*).

(COLONEL L., *with tears in his eyes, as he watches RUSSELL lead MADALYN off R. RUSSELL finally, in the most dejected manner, lowers his hands, and leans against bench. CAL. at gate, looking after RUSSELL and then down at RUSSELL, chuckles with satisfaction.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE.—A plain chamber IN THE BUNGALOW, *with door at back R., and curtained window at back L. Doors also R. 2, and L. 1. Mission table and chairs R. C. Lighted lamp on table. Fireplace L. 3. Couch L. C. Other furniture. Screen in upper R. corner. Indian blankets and trophies to dress walls. Books, pen and ink on table. Carpet down. TIME.—Evening.*

DISCOVERED—MADALYN, *neatly dressed, seated at table, writing a letter.*

MADALYN (*blotting sheet*). There, that will do. I ought surely to receive a reply to that. They promised to write to me, and here five days have elapsed and not a line—

not even a word. Surely, they cannot have forgotten me so soon? No, there must be some other reason—some other explanation for their silence. Now, let me see, how does it read. (*Takes up letter and reads to herself.*)

ENTER GASTON, slowly, door at back, with several pieces of firewood. Crosses to fireplace, intently looking back at MADALYN.

MADALYN (*looking up*). Why, it's you, Gaston!

GASTON (*starting from his reverie*). Yes, Miss—yes. I've fetched the wood. (*Places wood on floor beside fireplace*) The night will be cold—there's a stiff breeze blowing.

MADALYN (*placing letter in envelope and addressing it*). Good, dear Gaston. Always looking after my welfare. (*Sighs*) I don't know how I should have gotten on without you.

GASTON (*his eyes lighting up, crossing to her*). Do you really mean that, Miss? (*Sits on floor close to her chair.*)

MADALYN (*puzzled at his manner*). Of course. Why?

GASTON (*sighs and draws away*). Never mind, Miss—I had no right to think of it.

MADALYN. I don't understand you, Gaston.

GASTON (*sorrowfully*). It is well you do not. I was born a gypsy, and such I must remain to the end.

MADALYN. My! how serious you've grown. Really, I've never seen you just like this before.

GASTON (*with an attempt at hilarity*). No? Well, I'm a victim of moods. (*Laughing heartily*) You see, the spell is broken now—I'm all laughter again.

MADALYN. Dear, good Gaston. (*Then glancing at letter*) I wonder whether you'd go on an errand for me?

GASTON (*dreamily*). I'd go to the end of the world for you.

MADALYN (*smilingly*). Well, I wouldn't ask you to do that. In this case it's only a question of half a mile or so. I want this letter delivered (*Looks around before continuing*) to my old home—to my foster father—Colonel Dexter.

GASTON (*looking around cautiously*). It's against orders. Your father would never forgive me.

MADALYN. Oh, Gaston—and I never thought you afraid!

GASTON (*snatching letter from her*). And I am! No, no, it isn't that—not that—only—(*Firmly*)—Have no fear. I will deliver your letter. (*Rising. Then starts*) What was that? Didn't you hear a footfall?

MADALYN (*listens intently*). I heard nothing.

GASTON (*alarmed, starts for door*). If we have been overheard it will——

ENTER CAL. CHASE, *door at back, wearing riding boots and carrying a crop.*

CAL. (*glancing from one to the other*). Heigho. I find you two together again. (*Sharply, to MADALYN*) Didn't I say——

MADALYN (*giving him a hard look*). You have said far too much already. [EXIT R.

CAL. (*bitterly, looking after her*). Still as haughty as ever, eh? I've been too easy with her. We've all been too easy. (*Turning on GASTON, who, on his knees, cowers near fireplace, as if greatly in fear*) As for you—you whimpering dog——

GASTON (*piteously*). Spare me, master—spare me!

CAL. (*angrily*). I warned you never to speak to that girl, didn't I? Yet I find you sneaking about the place waiting for an opportunity to disobey my orders. But you won't break my rules again! Do you hear that? For I'm going to (*With uplifted crop making as if to strike GASTON*) give you——

ENTER ROSSI, *from door L., in time to seize crop as it is about to descend on GASTON's body.*

ROSSI (*coolly completing CAL's line*). This crop, eh? Oh, thank you.

CAL. (*angrily*). So you're in on this little conspiracy, too, eh?

ROSSI. I'm *in* on more than I reckoned—in on too many for the welfare of my neck. However, I won't see this poor friend beaten or abused.

CAL. (*snapping fingers*). Oh, pshaw!

ROSSI. Neither by you or any one—(*then as CAL. shrugs shoulders, firmly*)—do you understand—you or any one! (*To GASTON*) Rise, Gaston.

GASTON. Thanks, master—thanks. (*Rises and goes slowly over to door at back, and EXIT.*)

CAL. You're a fool, Rossi.

ROSSI. I am many things, but I can't help feeling grateful to one who risked his very life to save mine.

CAL. (*sitting on couch*). He saved your life?

ROSSI (c.) Yes. Perhaps before this you have guessed that I am a gypsy by choice only. I had as good chances as you or any man, but love of wine and other luxuries robbed me of my opportunities—my wits—my all. I lived happily with my wife, a beautiful woman, until so-called friends led me from my fireside to their dens of iniquity. Cards, and the rest that goes with them, brought me to poverty's door, and I sunk lower and lower until at last I came to lose even my identity.

CAL. And this garb—this gypsy's dress?

ROSSI. Came to me quite by accident. In one of my awful drinking spells, I deserted my wife and wandered far afoot. I was dazed, in a stupor—out of my mind, I guess—and knew nothing of what happened until some days had passed, and I opened them only to gaze upon Gaston—the same poor, deformed Gaston—whom I prevented you from striking but a moment ago—who was hovering over me.

CAL. I begin to get the drift of things.

ROSSI. I'd been found at the roadside, nearer death than anything, by a band of wandering gypsies, the leader of whom was Gaston's father. Instead of passing on and permitting me to die—they had succored me to life, and health. It was a week before I was strong enough to move. It was months before I came to know the truth. Believing it too late to return to my old home, for they must by then have thought me dead, I continued to live

with my newly found friends and finally became one of them. Don't you realize—don't you see, now, what a debt I owe to Gaston?

CAL. That's no reason why you should tread on my toes.

ROSSI (*firmly*). I shall always oppose any one who opposes Gaston.

CAL. Then you'll come to grief quick enough. One word from me and you go to prison.

ROSSI. Prison?

CAL. You forget Madalyn. She is not your daughter. You've committed a serious offense against the law in your little kidnapping episode. Better remain on good terms with me and insure your future freedom.

ROSSI (*looking at him sharply*). You rascal. Then you would——

CAL. (*calmly*). My dear fellow, I would do anything to gain my end. (*Knock on door, back.*)

CAL. (*starts*). Who can that be?

ROSSI. Gaston, likely.

CAL. Hold on. He has a key. He wouldn't knock, would he? (*Glancing around*) I mustn't be seen here.

ROSSI. Don't be alarmed. It is Gaston with the wood. (*Opens door.*)

ENTER ALEC. *carrying a basket.*

CAL. (*gives a start*). Of all persons!

ALEC. (*espying him*). Well, if it ain't Marse Chase. Lordy me, ah nevah 'spected to see yo' here.

CAL. (*to ROSSI. Glancing uneasily toward door, R.*). Make certain the girl doesn't hear.

ROSSI (*over to door. Listens*). All is quiet within. You need have no fear.

CAL. (*angrily to ALEC.*) What do you want anyway?

ALEC. Nuthin' much. I done lost mah way to Milton—dat's all. It got so turrible dark I ran plumb into the wrong road. When I see'd de light frum dis window I thought I'd ask mah way, but a couple o' youngsters tried to frighten me off by sayin' dis place wuz haunted.

(*Looking around, then to CAL.*) Kain't be much haunted ef you am here, Marse Chase.

CAL. (*nervously*). I would prefer you said nothing at the villa about having seen me here to-night.

ALEC. Lordy—am it as secret as dat?

CAL. Yes—and I will pay you well if you can hold your tongue. (*Offering him money*) Here, take this and keep mum.

ALEC. (*puzzled*). I don't see nuthin' wrong hereabouts, (*Referring to Rossi*) 'cept p'haps dat gypsy. And he wuz at the villa the day Missey Madalyn went away, since when we ain't had nuthin' but cryin' and bellowin' at the house.

CAL. (*angrily*). Stop your confounded prattle. I've a reason for not wanting the Colonel or his people to know you saw me here. Now, that isn't much to ask of an old friend, is it?

ALEC. No, it 'taint much and it 'taint little.

CAL. (*his arm about ALEC.'s shoulder*). Come, old chap, what do you say? Is it to be silence and the twenty dollar note, or what——

ALEC. (*scratching head*). I don't fo' de world see why you want to pay all dat money jes' to keep me quiet, but since yo' are so all-fired anxious, why I reckon (*Holding out hand*) it am de twenty dollar note. (*Then adding, after a pause*) And no counterfeit, nuther.

CAL. (*over-joyed*). Good! Here you are. (*Handing him money*) Remember, silence is the word!

ALEC. Oh, you needn't bother 'bout dat a' tall. Good night, Marse Chase. (*To Rossi*) Good night, gypsy. [EXIT door at back.

ROSSI. Do you think he can be trusted?

CAL. (*nervously*). It's a case where I've got to take a chance. And just when things were running so smoothly. We haven't been disturbed here since our arrival, owing to the fears of our neighbors, who believe the stories about the ghosts and all that rot. But now—now I'm afraid the secret's out. (*Knock on door, back.*)

ROSSI (*starts*). What, another? This is our busy night.

CAL. Make sure this time. But hold on—I forgot I was expecting the sheriff.

ROSSI (*puzzled*). The sheriff?

CAL. Yes. I told him to meet me here. (Rossi opens door cautiously.)

ENTER ZEB. HICKMAN, door, back.

ZEB. Hello, folks.

CAL. (*anxiously*). Any mail?

ZEB. Nuthin' fo' you.

CAL. (*dejectedly sinking into chair*). No news! no news! God!

ZEB. (*producing a letter*). But there was one for the gal——

CAL. (*quickly up*). For Madalyn? (*Snatches it from him*) From Colonel Dexter—I know the writing. Directed to General Delivery. Now, who—(*Looking up*) There's treachery here—mark my word for it. How should the Colonel know where to write unless—(*Tears letter open and quickly scans it*) It looks as if this might be in answer to a letter she sent him! (*To Rossi*) Didn't I tell you——

ROSSI. I had nothing to do with it—don't scowl at me!

CAL. (*changing tone*). Well, we've been outwitted, that's all.

ROSSI. There must be some mistake. You don't suppose——

CAL. I'm not supposing anything. I know that your partner——

ROSSI. Not Gaston?

CAL. Yes, Gaston! He has played the traitor!

ROSSI. No, no, it can't be. I've known the lad too long. I would trust him with my life.

CAL. Well, I'm not taking such chances. (*Tearing up letter*) At any rate she'll not receive the answer. This is the third I've destroyed. Better question Gaston, for there must be some explanation of this—(*Then changing tone*)—well, shall we say mystery? (*Then to ZEB.*) And now, sheriff, a word with you. (*Looking towards chair*)

Sit down. (ZEB. sits. To Rossi) You might also join us. This concerns us all. (Rossi, puzzled, sits) I have work for you. (Sits and looks around room before again speaking) As you doubtless know, sheriff, the bank is on the verge of failure. I'll be frank in saying that I've stolen an amount aggregating fifty thousand dollars from the funds on deposit during the past six months.

ROSSI (*repeating*). Fifty thousand dollars!

CAL. Oh, it's a large sum, I admit—but this is not the time for regrets. The theft must be covered up in some manner or I am lost—for the bank examiners are due day after to-morrow. Now, what I propose is—(*Glancing around before speaking*)—a bank robbery!

ROSSI and ZEB. (*together*). A bank robbery!

CAL. Yes, but one in name only. I have thought it over, and it is my plan that the bank be broken into to-morrow night, the safe rifled, papers scattered all about—but nothing taken.

ZEB. Nothing?

CAL. Don't you see? In the morning upon discovering the alleged robbery, we will claim the fifty thousand dollars—the exact amount I've *borrowed*—(ZEB. coughs pointedly. CAL. continues angrily)—well, *stolen* then, was taken by the thieves. In this way the bank examiners would be thrown completely off their guard, and I would be on my feet again.

ZEB. And you depend—

CAL. On you and Rossi here, going through with the job. It's easy. Nothing to it; and I'll pay you each a thousand dollars.

ROSSI (*rising*). You'll have to count me out.

CAL. (*furious*). Count you out? Impossible—I've counted you in. You've got to stick.

ROSSI (*bringing hand heavily down on table*). You heard what I said. You must count me out.

CAL. You mean that you're going to throw me over?

ROSSI. I mean that I've done with deceit and treachery; done with the old life. This last—the stealing of that poor girl—was the meanest trick of my whole miserable career.

CAL. (*with sarcasm*). Growing sentimental, eh?

ROSSI. She really believes me to be her father, and has treated me as such. Can't you see, man—haven't you heart enough to realize that we've committed a great wrong, and one that can never be undone?

CAL. You're a fool—and always preaching. (*To ZEB.*) Anyhow, sheriff—you stick?

ZEB. You know me, boss. I'm with you in any game.

CAL. (*to ROSSI. Fiercely*). And so will you, Jean Rossi, or I'll tell them all——

ROSSI (*rising*). The truth? About the kidnapping?

CAL. (*with a wicked smile*). Everything! It means a long term, old man. Better stick to your real friends. The girl is nothing to you.

ROSSI (*sinking into chair. Repeating slowly*). Nothing to me? I wish I really thought so. There's something about Madalyn—(*Looking up*)—Why, do you know, I sometimes think——

CAL. (*disgustedly*). Oh, you've told me that fairy tale a hundred different times. It's sickening. You're a fool.

ROSSI (*with a sigh*). I suppose I am. But she does so resemble my poor dead wife—my Catharine. (*Sobs, resting his head on hands on table.*)

CAL. (*aside to ZEB.*). The fellow's growing weak. It's time we got rid of him. He'll give the whole snap away sooner or later. Meet me at the tavern. I may want to strike a blow this very night.

ZEB. All right, boss—I'm on.

CAL. (*to ROSSI. Patting him on shoulder*). There, there, old man. Don't let the things get on your nerves. Life's too short. Brace up, follow my example—and take things as they come. I've a bottle in one of my saddle bags outside that'll warm the cockles of your heart.

ROSSI (*wipes eyes on sleeve and slowly rises*). I'm an old woman—weeping that way. But I jes' can't help giving away sometimes. It catches me in the throat. (*Then changing tone*) Are you leaving us?

CAL. Yes, I go to town. Won't see you again for the rest of the week unless you——

ROSSI (*shaking head*). Don't—please don't ask me to join you in the bank transaction. I want to live right from now on. I want to start anew.

CAL. (*patting ZEB. on shoulder*). Did you ever see anything funnier, Zeb.? Did you ever hear the like? (*Gives a loud laugh.*) [EXIT CAL. and ZEB. at back, laughing.

ROSSI (*going up and looking off after them*). Yes, laugh—laugh your heartiest. But you can never realize what I have gone through the past five days—you will never know the truth. [EXIT *slowly after them.*

ENTER MADALYN *from R.*

MADALYN (*looks about. Calls*). Oh, dad, dad! (*Pauses*) I wonder where he could have gotten to? I thought I heard his voice. (*Goes to door at back*) Locked! Always locked! I can't understand it all. The going's on in this place have nearly robbed me of my reason. If it wasn't for dad—he's so kind and gentle—I don't know what I'd do. (*Starts*) What was that? (*Goes to window, draws back*) Some one's at the window. Who can it be? (*Starts for door R. Calling*) Dad! Dad!

ENTER GASTON *through window.*

MADALYN (*turning and starting*). You—Gaston!

GASTON (*glancing mysteriously about*). Don't be alarmed.

MADALYN. My, but you frightened me!

GASTON. There was no other way. The master and his visitors would have passed us on the gravel path—

MADALYN. Us? Then you are not alone?

GASTON. I delivered your letter and brought a surprise for you.

MADALYN. A surprise?

GASTON. Behold! (*Drawing curtains of window aside, presents RUSSELL FORD to view.*)

RUSSELL (*with arms outstretched*). Madalyn!

MADALYN (*staggered*). Do my eyes deceive me?

RUSSELL. Aren't you glad to see me?

MADALYN. Yes, yes, but it was so sudden. (*Going to him*) The joy is overwhelming.

RUSSELL (*tossing cap carelessly on table—taking her in his arms*). It seems eternity since last we were together.

GASTON (*who has peered through curtains*). We must be careful. The master is likely to return at any moment.

RUSSELL (*to MADALYN*). How have you fared? How have you gotten on in your new surroundings?

MADALYN. My father has been most kind to me. I could want for nothing save——

RUSSELL (*anxiously*). Save what?

MADALYN. Well, perhaps I shouldn't complain—but I've been allowed no freedom since leaving the villa.

RUSSELL (*looking around*). Gaston told me of the whole wretched business.

MADALYN. I am always locked in when father goes away—and am never permitted out of his sight when he is home.

RUSSELL. Strange—very strange. What can be the reason for it?

MADALYN. I don't know. That's why I sent the letter by Gaston.

RUSSELL. And you don't know how glad I was to receive it. We all wondered at your silence.

MADALYN. Why, I've written over a dozen letters.

RUSSELL. And we've received never a one.

MADALYN (*to GASTON*). Gaston knows. He can tell you. Cal. Chase was to deliver them.

RUSSELL (*starts*). Cal. Chase? Why, he even denied knowing your whereabouts.

MADALYN. And he's been here every day—very frequently, several times a day.

RUSSELL. Singular, indeed. What could have been his motive? (*Then, after a pause, looking at MADALYN*) Unless——

GASTON (*suddenly drawing away from curtains*). S-h. Make haste! The master returns. He will never forgive my treachery should he find you here.

MADALYN. Gaston is right. We must not endanger his welfare.

RUSSELL (*to MADALYN*). Good-bye, Madalyn—until we meet again.

GASTON (*nervously*). Hurry, hurry!

MADALYN. Good-bye, good-bye. (*Loud knock on door, back.*)

GASTON (*to RUSSELL*). Quick! The curtains! The curtains! (*RUSSELL hurriedly hides behind the curtains; GASTON cautiously up to door, back. MADALYN, composing herself, goes to door. Knock repeated.*)

MADALYN (*aloud*). Who is it?

ROSSI (*without*). It is I, your father.

MADALYN. The door is locked from without.

ROSSI (*without*). Ah, yes, you are right, my child. How forgetful of me. (*Opens door*) I'm becoming an old fogey in my latter days. (*As ROSSI enters, GASTON crouches close to door and noiselessly exits as door closes behind him, without being seen.*)

ROSSI (*his hands on MADALYN'S shoulders*). Ah, Madalyn, you are a good girl. (*Sighs*) And your old father is a—(*With toss of head*)—Well, never mind what he is.

MADALYN. What ails you, dad, you always look at me so strangely? Are you ill?

ROSSI (*slowly*). No, my child, not exactly. Though I have got a bit of a headache.

MADALYN. A headache? Poor, dear dad. (*Drawing him to chair L. of table*) Sit down and let me try to help you.

ROSSI (*feebly protesting*). I'll be myself in a few moments. Perhaps the refreshing night air will cool my fevered brow. Yes—a good idea. (*Starts toward window*) There's a stiff breeze from this window. (*Seizes end of curtain and is about to draw it aside.*)

MADALYN (*quickly up, staying his hand*). No, no, dad—I've a better way. (*Rossi looks into her face intently for an instant. Holding picture—slowly repeats.*) A better way. (*Then, after a pause, slowly leads him to chair and gently pushes him in seat*) Don't you remember? I cured your headache last evening by merely rubbing your forehead with the tips of my fingers?

ROSSI. You're right, my dear. My forgetting so soon was quite unpardonable.

MADALYN. Now, just sit still and don't move. That's it. (*Begins to rub hands slowly over his forehead, for an instant, each time covering his eyes, and nervously glancing toward curtains.* RUSSELL suddenly out from behind curtains and cautiously over to door, back. Continuing to rub Rossi's brow). Well, dad, how goes the headache.

ROSSI (*slowly*). Wonderful forethought on your part, my dear. It's gradually disappearing. (*Very slowly*) Seems to be going—going——(*RUSSELL has now opened door and quickly EXIT at back.*)

MADALYN (*as door closes upon him. Gasps*). Gone!

ROSSI (*jubilantly*). Yes, my dear, gone! Gone! How did you guess it? How did you know?

MADALYN (*with forced laugh*). Intuition, my dear dad, (*Patting his cheek*)—intuition.

ROSSI. A wonderful thing—that intuition. And now it's time we closed up shop. (*Rises*) I know you're tired, my dear, and so am I. (*Going to door at back*) Hello, I forgot to lock the door. First time I overlooked it. (*To MADALYN*) You get my lamp. It's been a long day, my dear—the longest of the year. (*Locks door.*)

MADALYN (*at door R.*). It has been long, dad, hasn't it?

[EXIT R.]

ROSSI. Long, long indeed. And many things have happened. (*Over to window*) What was she up to when I entered the room? Surely I heard voices and the hurrying of feet as I approached. (*Drawing curtains aside. Looks out*) And a ladder lying on the ground below, which evidently tumbled over but a while ago. (*Chuckling*) She didn't want me to draw the curtains. (*Slowly nods head and comes DOWN*) I wonder why—why? (*Espying RUSSELL's cap on table*) Ah, now I know. (*Picking up cap and looking at it*) The young surveyor's cap. I guessed right from the start. They love each other. (*Hiding cap under table*) And he's been here to see her. I'm glad he got away safely. God knows I don't want to interfere in their love-making. And the course of true love will run smooth from now on, if I have any say. Cal. Chase shan't hinder them—(*Sits L. of table*)—no, not while I live!

ENTER MADALYN, *from R., carrying a lamp.*

ROSSI (*slowly*). Madalyn, I want to speak to you.

MADALYN (*places lamp on table and comes around L. of* ROSSI, *kneeling at his side*). Yes, dad.

ROSSI (*after a pause*). What would you say, my dear, if some one was to tell you I am not the good man you suppose me?

MADALYN. I would say they told a falsehood—an untruth.

ROSSI. Nothing could shake your faith in me?

MADALYN. Oh, dad, why do you talk that way? I wouldn't believe anything but what you yourself might tell me.

ROSSI (*his arm about her shoulder*). I'm thankful for that, dear—thankful for that. And now, good-night. (*Then espying locket about her neck*) But, stay,—I've never seen this before? Where did you get it?

MADALYN (*referring to locket*). This locket? Why, the Colonel gave me that the day you came for me at the villa. He told me my mother had worn it about her neck, the day she died. (*Opening locket*) See, it contains her portrait.

ROSSI (*starts. Hardly audible*). Catharine! My God!

MADALYN (*referring to locket*). And here is your's. (*ROSSI, starts again*) Your's—when you were a younger man. (*Looking from ROSSI to locket*) And yet you haven't changed a great deal, have you, dad?

ROSSI (*presses locket to lips. Brokenly*). Catharine, my wife, my poor wife.

MADALYN. I ought to have shown it to you before but I thought you—

ROSSI (*not heeding her*). And I never knew—I never really suspected. (*Rising*) I'll return this to you in the morning, dear. (*Leading her to door, R.*) Good night, my child, (*Kissing her*)—good night.

MADALYN. Good night, dad—good night. [EXIT R.]

ROSSI (*looks after her an instant*). My own child—my little Helen, and I might never have known, (*Looks in-*

tently at locket) but for this. (*Sadly shakes head*) No wonder the Colonel didn't long hesitate in turning her over to me. This portrait must have been convincing proof to him. (*Presses locket to lips*) Poor, poor Catharine. Could I but undo the past—but bring you back to life, how happy I would be. (*Knock on door, back. Starts*) Who can that be? And at this hour? (*Over to door*) Who is it?

GASTON (*without. In whispers*). It is I, master—Gaston.

ROSSI. Why, I thought you'd gone to bed. (*Opening door. ENTER GASTON*) What has happened? Why are you so nervous?

GASTON (*breathlessly*). We are in danger.

ROSSI. Danger?

GASTON. From the sheriff and his men.

ROSSI (*locking door*). Go on, go on, what is it?

GASTON. I was at the rear of the bungalow when, in the moonlight I figured I saw the shadows of two men. I crept near them and hid in the thicket. I recognized their voices. It was Cal. Chase and the sheriff.

ROSSI. Why, I thought they'd driven to town.

GASTON. That was part of their ruse. I couldn't learn their motive, but they apparently fear you are no longer to be trusted, so what do you suppose?

ROSSI. I can't imagine.

GASTON. They've decided to wait until the house is dark; break in and steal the girl away.

ROSSI (*aroused*). Madalyn, my girl—my daughter? (*Then to GASTON*) For you know—she really is my daughter.

GASTON (*looking at him in amazement*). Really is your daughter?

ROSSI. Yes. I only learned the truth to-night—though I had suspected something of the sort since that fateful day that brought me to the villa. (*Then changing subject*) We have no time to lose. Go on with your story.

GASTON. Then I heard Cal. say, "We must not stop at anything—even to killing her vagabond father."

ROSSI. Enough! The sooner we come to know our fate the better. You will stand by me Gaston, to the end. (*Offers hand.*)

GASTON. Have I ever failed you, master? (*Warmly grasping his hand*) To the end!

ROSSI. Good. Put out that light. (*GASTON puts out light of lamp and gets so, curtain of window conceals him against the rear wall*) Now draw into the shadows and leave everything to me. (*Gets behind screen.*)

(*The stage is dark, save for the blue light without, which streams through the parted curtains. A deadly silence for a moment, then CAL. CHASE observed without, peering through window. Breaking of glass heard, then curtains are drawn apart and CAL. ENTERS room. Goes to door R. and listens, then returns to window and gives a long, warning whistle. Then crosses to door L. and listens.*)

ENTER ZEB. HICKMAN *through window, and going R. stubs toe against chair. Gives a howl of pain, and jumps up and down in great anguish.*

CAL. Keep quiet, you fool. You'll wake the household. (*Then, when quiet is restored*) There's her room. I'll keep guard in this room. You get her here as quietly as possible, and once outside, it will be an easy thing to force her into the closed carriage. Do you understand?

ZEB. Perfectly. (*Goes to door R. GASTON now gets behind curtains in window.*)

CAL. If any one interferes in the performance of my task, well—you know what it means. Now hurry.

EXIT ZEB. R.

CAL. (*glances toward window. Bitterly*). Now, Jean Rossi, I guess I'm through with you. (*Nervously*) I do hope he'll hurry.

ZEB. (*off R.*). I've got you at last!

MADALYN (*off R.*). Let me go—let me go. Help, dad—help! (*Sounds of a scuffle follow.*)

CAL. (*excitedly*). Hurry, sheriff! Hurry! (*Quickly lights lamp.*)

ZEB. (*off R.*). Come on, come on, resistance will only make it harder for you.

MADALYN (*off R., pleadingly*). Please—please let me go.

CAL. (*anxiously*). Hurry—hurry.

ZEB. (*roughly pushes MADALYN on from R. MADALYN's hands are secured at back, and she has a handkerchief tied about her mouth*). There she is!

CAL. (*triumphantly*). At last! At last! (*Seizing her about waist*) Now you'll come with me.

ROSSI (*bobbing from behind screen, revolver in hand*). Not just yet, my friend!

CAL. (*staggered*). Jean Rossi!

ROSSI (*out from behind screen and opening door at back*). Jean Rossi—at your service. (*Then to MADALYN*) Come, Madalyn—come!

MADALYN (*quickly to door, back, ROSSI removes handkerchief from her mouth and she EXITS, while ROSSI still holds them off until door closes and he, too, makes escape.*)

CAL. (*infuriated, drawing revolver. To sheriff*). Quick, sheriff—the window, we must shoot to kill! (*ZEB. and CAL. make a dash for the window.*)

GASTON (*dashing curtains aside and leveling revolver, holds them at bay*). Yes—shoot to kill!

ZEB. and CAL. (*are aghast*).

CURTAIN.

ACT III.

SCENE.—Wood Drop at Back. Tree wings at either side. A small pile of wood R. C., under which a red electric bulb or red lamp. Green baize down. Grass mats strewn about. TIME.—Early morning.

DISCOVERED.—MADALYN lying on a small bundle of straw, R. of fire, covered by a shawl or blanket, and GASTON seated on a tree stump, L. of fire. He is whittling a stick and drumming a tune.

GASTON (*after a moment*). Poor girl. Tired out with the excitement of the night she sleeps. (*Sighs*) Ah, what would I not give to live my life over again. I never dreamt that I, Gaston, the vagabond, would fall in love. But she is not for me. She must never know. A wanderer I was born—and a wanderer I must die. But they shan't harm her. No, not while I live. (*Tosses stick aside and glances about him*) I thought I heard a sound.

ROSSI (*well off R.*). Hello there—hello.

GASTON (*up*). Yes, I was sure of it. (*At back, looking off R. Waves hat. Aloud*) Hello! (*Coming DOWN*) It's the master—the master, at last!

ENTER JEAN ROSSI *from R.*

GASTON (*finger to lips—referring to MADALYN*). S-h.

ROSSI (*lowering voice*). Ah, she still sleeps. (*Arm about GASTON*) Gaston, my boy—I've struck luck.

GASTON. Where have you been all the night?

ROSSI. First, I walked to the village—

GASTON (*surprised*). Why, that's—

ROSSI. Oh, yes—a good, long walk. I know—for I speak from experience. I thought to arrange for a room for Madalyn but the hotels are all filled with visitors for the fair to-morrow. And I found a great many, who, like myself, had had no sleep for the night.

GASTON. Indeed?

ROSSI (*confidentially*). Our friend Chase is drawing near the end of his rope—or all signs fail. Hundreds of depositors were standing in line awaiting the opening of the bank this morning.

GASTON. Which means?

ROSSI. That he is not far from the end. (*Looking at MADALYN, who has now awakened*) Ah, Madalyn—awake? I fancy your improvised couch did not—

MADALYN. No apologies, father. I don't know when I rested better. The cool air, the rustling of the leaves, the twittering of the birds were all so new to me. I never before realized the grandeur of it all; I never imagined—

ROSSI (*laughing*). What a gypsy's life was like. (*Help-*

ing her up) Well, you'll put up with no more of it. I've arranged for your breakfast. (*Enthusiastically*) Fruit, porridge, eggs, a bumper of fresh milk and a mountain of griddle cakes—so high. (*Illustrates.*)

GASTON (*surprised*). Master, are you dreaming?

ROSSI. Far from it, Gaston. I've arranged it all at the farm house but a stone's throw away. (*Pointing R.*) There! See! (*To MADALYN*) You are to go there, dear, and breakfast. The hostess—a fine, motherly lady—awaits you.

MADALYN (*throwing shawl over shoulders*). You're so considerate, father.

ROSSI. Now, don't linger. The cakes will grow cold with waiting—and we must be starting on our way.

MADALYN. And you—and Gaston?

ROSSI. I've had my fill already. Gaston's is arranged for when you return. Now, don't be long.

MADALYN. I won't—I won't.

EXIT R.

ROSSI (*to GASTON, when they are alone*). I had a reason for not wanting you to go. I've not breakfasted. I only said so, that we might have a word together. You, Gaston, must help me. Help me, perhaps, for the last time.

GASTON (*anxiously*). In what way, kind master? Only tell me—in what way?

ROSSI. You know the Colonel's villa, at Milton?

GASTON. Yes—at the end of this road. (*Points L.*)

ROSSI. I want you to hurry there; beg an audience on any pretext—and tell him what occurred last night.

GASTON. About the attack at the bungalow?

ROSSI. Yes, but also about Madalyn—about the locket—(*Brokenly*)—about my discovery that she is—

GASTON. Your own daughter. Yes, yes, I understand.

ROSSI. I fought it all out last night in the hills, there. (*Pointing R. Then placing hand on GASTON'S shoulder*) Things can't go on like this. We're robbing the child of her destiny. She's entitled to better than we can ever offer her. She was happy in the Colonel's household. She will continue to be happy there.

GASTON (*with difficulty*). You're—you're going to return Madalyn to them?

ROSSI. Isn't it all for the best? Tell them the whole story—tell them everything, even to why we took her away that day. Conceal nothing, and ask the Colonel to come here. When he knows the truth he will be willing to forgive us, perhaps, for the miserable part we played.

GASTON. I will do your bidding, master. And then?

ROSSI (*looking at him*). I don't understand, Gaston.

GASTON (*humbly*). Then—when she is finally lost to us—

ROSSI. My dear Gaston, one would almost think the parting as hard for you as for me.

GASTON (*brokenly*). It is, kind master—it is; for I love your daughter.

ROSSI (*surprised*). You love Madalyn?

GASTON (*with bowed head*). I have loved her ever since that day when first we met. (*On knees*) It was unpardonable, master—but you will forgive my weakness, I know.

ROSSI. Rise, Gaston—rise. There is nothing to forgive. But that is only another reason why we must part from Madalyn. She was never meant for you, Gaston—never for you. We will leave her to her life and continue on ours. In a month we will have reached new climes and have forgotten all about this region and its people.

GASTON (*warmly*). I will never, never forget.

ROSSI (*firmly*). You must—you must! And now, Gaston—do my bidding. (*Pointing L.*) Go!

GASTON. Yes, master. (*Slowly up L., turning*) If I succeed in bringing the Colonel with me, I will give the warning signal.

[EXIT L.]

ROSSI (*looking after him. Slowly shakes head.*) Poor, poor fellow. In love, and with my Madalyn. I pity you, Gaston—but you should realize the hopelessness of your cause. (*Sighs*) I'm glad I decided as I did before knowing the truth. He might have misconstrued it. (*Turning to R.*) Hello, as I live—someone's in the bushes. Yes, I'm sure of it. An eavesdropper! (*Hurriedly off R., immediately returning, leading ALEC. by the ear*) I thought so—an eavesdropper!

ALEC. (*his knees quaking*). No, indeedy, marse. I was skeered, dat's all—plumb skeered.

ROSSI. That does not explain anything. Why are you here? Why are you——

ALEC. (*in agony*). Jes' let go mah ear, boss, and I tells yo' everything.

ROSSI (*releasing him*). Well, sir—go on—but remember—everything!

ALEC. I've been hunting fo' you folks since last night.

ROSSI (*folding arms and looking at him*). Oh, that's it, eh?

ALEC. (*shivering*). Gospel truth, marse—only don't look at me dat way. It wuz all de Colonel's 'structions arter I cum back frum de bungelaloo—or whatever you calls it.

ROSSI. Ah, then you told him, eh?

ALEC. (*his knees quaking*). I couldn't jes' help it. Cause when I found dere warn't no ghosts or spirits in dat house, other'n yo' and Marse Chase—my tongue wouldn't keep still. I couldn't keep de secret.

ROSSI. You told the Colonel.

ALEC. I done told de Colonel—yes, sir, and he sez—sez he—“yo go right back and see whether you kin find the missey dar.” Well, I scurried back—but found de place empty—empty as a hencoop after—well, nevah mind, after what. Den I *did* git scared thinkin' 'bout dem ghosts and things, and I was on my way back home, when you all grabbed me by the ear and all neah jerked mah head off. Dat's all der's to it—dat's all, sho' as I live.

ROSSI (*sternly*). No, it isn't all. The Colonel gave you a letter——

ALEC. (*his knees quaking*). Fortune tellin' agin! Tain't no use tryin' to keep things from you. You sho' kin read dem pasts, presents and futures. Das right, he gave me a letter. (*Producing it*) Here it am.

ROSSI (*snatching letter from him*). Now—go! Go as fast as your legs will carry you.

ALEC. (*taking long strides to L.*). Don't yo' worry—I'll go, all right.

ROSSI. And tell the Colonel just what happened.

ALEC. (*at L.*). Yo' kin bet I will. I'll tell him everything—and more, too. — [EXIT *quickly*, L.]

ROSSI. Now the Colonel will surely come—whether he believes Gaston's story or not. (*Looks at envelope*) Addressed to Madalyn. How the old fellow and his wife must love my child. (*Sighs*) Ah, it would be cruelty to take her away from them all. (*Sits on stump.*)

It is now daylight.

ENTER MADALYN *slowly from R., coming DOWN, places hand on ROSSI's shoulder.*

ROSSI (*soliloquizing*). I should have liked to have kept her to myself, to have made her love me—and me alone, but—(*Starts*) Why, my dear child, you couldn't have eaten a great deal in that time.

MADALYN (*wearily*). No, I had no appetite—I wasn't hungry.

ROSSI (*taking her hands*). What ails you, dear?

MADALYN (*kneels beside him*). Oh, I hardly know.

ROSSI. You wish for something, my dear. I can read it in your thoughts.

MADALYN. I have you, father. I could ask for nothing more.

ROSSI. You say so, because you think I would refuse it; because you think I have not the courage to look on and see that you love them better than me.

MADALYN. I don't understand, father.

ROSSI. The Colonel and his wife. Supposing I would allow you to see them again.

MADALYN (*joyfully*). The Colonel—my mother!

ROSSI. It *would* make a change in you, my dear, wouldn't it?

MADALYN. I should be supremely happy. (*Then observing that ROSSI's head is buried in his arm*) Why, dad, you are weeping. What have I done—what have I said to bring those tears? (*GASTON off L. gives a long whistle.*)

ROSSI (*drying eyes*). Gaston! (*Rises*) The warning whistle! (*Going up to back*) He is bringing the Colonel with him!

MADALYN (*starting*). The Colonel? He does not know I am here.

ROSSI. He knows far more, my dear, than you imagine. He knows the truth!

ENTER GASTON *leading* COLONEL DEXTER, and CHARLOTTE, *his wife*.

CHARLOTTE (*with arms outstretched*). Madalyn, my child!

MADALYN (*in her arms*). Mother—you here? Oh, to see you once again! (*They both go UP. GASTON DOWN L., intently watching MADALYN.*)

COLONEL (*shaking hands with Rossi*). You don't know what joy was ours when Gaston came to tell your hiding place.

ROSSI (*looking back at MADALYN, before speaking. Then, in low tone*). And Gaston has told you all?

COLONEL. Everything.

ROSSI (*with bowed head*). What must you think of me? How can I lift my head again? (*Brokenly*) Oh, wretched being that I am. (*Sinks on stump.*)

COLONEL (*patting him on shoulder*). Charlotte and I both pity you. You did wrong that never to be forgotten day—but we forgive you.

ROSSI (*clasping COLONEL's hand and pressing it to his lips*). God bless you for those words. It is more than I deserve.

COLONEL. And so you will leave Madalyn with us. But what have you decided for yourself?

ROSSI. I chose my life when I deserted my poor wife these many years ago. I have no alternative now—I must continue on my way.

COLONEL. No, no, you must remain with us.

ROSSI (*looking up*). With you?

COLONEL. With Madalyn—at the villa—at our home.

ROSSI (*with smile*). If only it were possible.

COLONEL. Nothing is impossible. You are experienced in gardening—and you would find a great deal to occupy your time.

ROSSI. It is very kind of you, sir. It is more than I have a right to expect.

COLONEL. Then you accept our offer. You will remain with us?

ROSSI. Gladly. (*Then suddenly espying GASTON*) But what of him—what of poor Gaston?

COLONEL (*stroking mustache*). H'm, yes—that is so. What is to become of him?

ROSSI. It would hardly do, I suppose, for you to grant him a place on your estate.

COLONEL. He is a gypsy and, of course——

ROSSI. I understand your position, Colonel Dexter. There is no place for Gaston in this world, save on the highway. A wanderer from the cradle—a wanderer to the grave! (UP.) I have reconsidered. So long as Gaston lives, I must remain with him.

COLONEL (*surprised*). You don't mean you refuse my offer?

ROSSI. My place is at his side. Don't ask me to desert the friend who saved me from destruction. Don't tempt me to do that, Colonel Dexter. My mind is quite made up. I can't accept your offer.

COLONEL. I am sorry, deeply sorry. But Madalyn—?

ROSSI. Madalyn goes back with you.

COLONEL (*offering hand*). I won't forget your sacrifice.

ROSSI (*warmly shaking his hand*). Nor I your generosity.

GASTON (*suddenly, looking L.*). Be careful, master! Be careful! The enemy! (*Quickly moves R.*)

ROSSI (*all action*). Why, what——?

ENTER CAL. CHASE, *breathlessly from L. He is covered with dust.*

CAL. Ah, so I find you all together. I suspected as much. Well, it is better so.

COLONEL (*sharply to CAL.*). We know you, sir, at last we know you for what you are.

CAL. (*taken aback*). So, that's it, eh? Well (*Pointing at Rossi*) then know him!

COLONEL. I imagine we know him better than you do.
(CHARLOTTE and MADALYN now come DOWN L.)

CAL. So, that's how it is!

COLONEL. He has told us everything.

CAL. (*surprised*). Even to the kidnapping, eh?

COLONEL. Even to *your* part in the scheme.

CAL. My part? I had no hand in this dirty work.
(*Defiantly*) The fellow lies!

GASTON (R.). He speaks the truth!

CAL. So you are in on the conspiracy, too? It has truthfully been said that "birds of a feather——"

ROSSI (*angrily*). You infer that I am a——(*Makes as if to attack CAL.*)

COLONEL (*stepping between them. To ROSSI*). There, there, calm yourself. We have no need to answer him.

CAL. (*infuriated*). Well, you will have need, by night-fall. You'll have a lot to answer for. My friend, the sheriff, will do *my* bidding, and for some time both you vagabonds will languish in the county jail. (*Starts to go L.*)

ENTER ALEC. *breathlessly, from L.*

ALEC. Marse Colonel—Marse Colonel—did you all hear de news?

COLONEL (*anxiously*). No, no—what is it?

ALEC. We jes' got word on the telephone. The Chase Bank am plumb busted.

CAL. (*coming DOWN—starts*). What's that?

ALEC. (*excitedly*). Hundreds ob people drew their money out dis mornin'——

CHARLOTTE (*anxiously to COLONEL*). Henry, Henry! What about your funds?

COLONEL. Anticipating just such a calamity, I fortunately, withdrew every dollar I had on deposit yesterday.

CAL. (*bitterly*). And by so doing—started the run!

ALEC. (*excitedly*). The bank's sho' gwine to the wall.
(*To CAL.*) And the mayor telephoned to say a posse wuz a lookin' fo' you.

CAL. (*despondently*). So that's it, eh? (*Desperately*) What I have feared has come at last—at last! I'm

ruined! Stone broke! Luckily the sheriff is with me. I need not fear the fury of the mob.

ENTER ZEB. HICKMAN *from L., followed by* RUSSELL FORD. *Both have been riding horses and are covered with dust.*

RUSSELL (*pointing at CAL.*) There he is, sheriff.

CAL. (*staggered*). Why, what's up? What does this mean?

ZEB. (*seizing CAL. by shoulder*). I'm sorry, old man, but you're under arrest.

CAL. (*surprised*). Under arrest? Me?

ZEB. Yep—for making away with the funds of the bank.

CAL. Why, I thought you were with me, Zeb.?

ZEB. My dear Cal.—I'm always with them as is on top.

CAL. (*bitterly*). And I looked upon you as my friend.

ZEB. Friendship don't go in love or politics, and I'm in politics. I'm lookin' out fer number one this time, and this thing will mean my re-election——

CAL. And *my* finish, I suppose.

ZEB. (*taking pair of handcuffs from pocket and dangling before CAL'S eyes*). Come on, now, old man, hold out your hands.

CAL. (*coolly*). All right, sheriff. I see I've got to go. (*Then suddenly drawing revolver from hip pocket*) But I won't go alone for, Jean Rossi, I take you with me. (*Levels revolver at ROSSI, who stands immovable.*)

GASTON (*same instant, quickly steps in front of ROSSI to shield him*). No, no, you must not! You must not! (*CAL. fires shot and GASTON, with a moan, falls dead. ZEB. seizes revolver and forces it from CAL. ROSSI kneels beside GASTON and quickly feels of his heart.*)

COLONEL (*after a pause. Anxiously*). How is he, Rossi?

ROSSI (*pauses effectively, then brokenly*). He's gone on his way, Colonel—gone on his way—alone!

CURTAIN.

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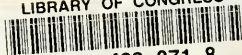
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